

## **US concerned over development of Pak nuclear arsenal**

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**Washington:** The US has expressed concern over development of Pakistan's nuclear weapons with lawmakers asking the American government to be tough on Islamabad as it does not seem to be sincere in improving ties with India and has accelerated the pace of arsenals' production.

"I wanted to say that we do share your concerns particularly about the development of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. We're concerned most by the pace and the scope of the Pakistan's missile program, including its pursuit of nuclear systems," Special US Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Olson told lawmakers during a hearing on Pakistan convened by House Foreign Affairs Committee.

"We are concerned that a conventional conflict in Southwest Asia could escalate to include nuclear use as well as the increase security challenges that accompany growing stockpiles. We have had a very active dialogue at the highest levels with the Pakistanis in which we have made clear the nature of our very specific concerns," Olson said yesterday in response to a question from Congressman Brian Higgins.

Higgins alleged that Pakistan is not sincere in improving its relationship with India.

"Pakistan is involved in an arms race against what it believes is its existential threat with India. According to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Pakistan could have 350 nuclear warheads in the next decade, becoming the world's third biggest nuclear power, outpacing India, France, China, and the UK," he said.

"There is no positive sign of any improved relations with India because Pakistan justifies its nuclear proliferation as a deterrent against aggression from the outside. So the US has to get tougher with Pakistan. We have to call them out on this double game they have been playing, not this year, not last year, not five years but for the past 15 years," Higgins said.

"Pakistan, let's be truthful about this, plays a double game. They're are military partner, but they're the protector and the patron of our enemies. And this has been going on for 15 years. Since 2002, US aid to Pakistan, economic and military, has averaged about USD 2 billion a year. Pakistan's annual defence budget is only about USD 5 billion a year."

He said if Pakistan falls apart or if Islamic extremists take over, it's a nightmare scenario for the US.

"It's a big country, about 180 million people, it has a lot of Islamic extremists, and it has nuclear weapons. And to have Islamic extremists with nuclear weapons is a primary goal of al-Qaeda and it would be major victory for them and the outgrowth of al-Qaeda, the Islamic state and a major defeat for us, the US," Higgins added.

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